

Friday, May 25, 2012
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I believe (at this point):

Ever since the Bay of Pigs, the Kennedy brothers were determined to remove Castro "by any means necessary." A covert campaign to do this, code-named Mongoose, was authorized in November, 1961, under the direction of Ed Lansdale. He was to be supervised by Bobby Kennedy, as part of the 40 Committee. (With the addition of RFK, it was known as the Special Group (Augmented)).

In one of its first internal documents, Mongoose was described by Lansdale as requiring the commitment of American combat forces, eventually—an American invasion of Cuba—to achieve its goal of replacing the Castro regime "with one that meets the needs and desires of the Cuban people," i.e., a pro-American regime.ⁱ

In line with this assumption in Mongoose (of the need for invasion), Kennedy reportedly directed that invasion plans for Cuba be prepared in November, 1961, at the same time as authorizing Mongoose, and several alternative plans were formally reviewed by Kennedy five different times during 1962.^{1 ii}

Shortly after this Mongoose statement, Kennedy (or, the brothers, with RFK directly supervising) approved the Mongoose planning *short of* planning for invasion. That planning, however, continued under the JCS in parallel with Mongoose, with Lansdale (whose office was in the Pentagon, in the Office of Special Operations in OSD) coordinating closely with the military.

It was at Lansdale's request (possibly at the suggestion of RFK; or it might have been the JCS) that the Northwoods memorandum was prepared listing possible "provocations" by Cuba that could be provoked or simulated covertly to justify American invasion. These proposals were approved by the JCS and by McNamara for presentation to the president, and recommended by both as a basis for action.ⁱⁱⁱ

According to Sergei Khrushchev and others, both Khrushchev and Castro believed with virtual certainty that Kennedy would follow up his failure at the Bay of Pigs with another attempt to overthrow Castro, and that time he would "do it right," with an invasion. This is misleadingly described by McNamara and Bundy, when they learned of it a quarter of a century later at conferences, as a "miscalculation" (though a plausible one, McNamara later "acknowledged"). This is a falsification of history. Their certainty may have been misjudged (though not by much), and it doesn't appear that JFK ever made a definite decision to invade, before the crisis; in

¹ McNamara asserts this, in the presence of Kennedy, in the briefing of Congressmen just before Kennedy's blockade speech on October 22, 1962. See May & Zelikow, p. 263.

fact, he almost surely did not. But there is no doubt at all that he was determined to have the option to invade on short notice: which required, and he demanded, a great deal of pre-planning and preparation. Why short notice? (Of the two major alternative plans, one was for very short notice, perhaps five days, which meant committing smaller forces in the first waves.) That could only be in order to take advantage of some "provocation" or opportunity that offered itself as an excuse for what would otherwise look like (and be) aggressive war.

It's striking that these contingency plans both had a target date of October 20, 1962 (Polmar and Gresham), just as did McNamara's directive of October 1, 1962, and as did the Mongoose planning, which aimed at a culmination of its "pressures" (presumably with invasion, to accompany an uprising) in October, 1962. What could that mean—why did Mongoose have to have a particular deadline at all, especially one so soon?—other than to be able (potentially) to produce a triumph just before the November, 1962 elections?^{iv}

It seems clear that for at least a year before the crisis (the photographing of the missiles on Oct. 14, 1962) Kennedy wanted to **be able** to invade Cuba on short notice. Khrushchev and Castro did not misread this aspect of his intentions, though they may—rightly or wrongly—have expected it with greater assurance than he did himself. In response (and they probably would have felt and done the same even if they had read his intentions closely, as being in some uncertainty as to what he would end up wanting to do) they agreed on the deployment to Cuba of Soviet materiel that could defend against and might deter an invasion.

This was after [check] Marines had actually conducted a rehearsal-exercise of the planning for invasion in Vieques, against a mock-regime of Ortsac. [NO: that one was in the fall.]

The buildup of Soviet military support to Castro's defenses beginning in July (?) might be thought to give pause to invasion planning, but doesn't seem to have done so at all. On the contrary, it gave the Republicans an excuse to demand a blockade or invasion, as a major issue for their upcoming election campaigns. Senators Capehart and Keating led this pressure, to prevent the establishment of a Soviet "base" in the western hemisphere.

It must be said that Kennedy himself did not pick up this banner, as he might have. There is something of a paradox here. The military planning, Mongoose, exercises and assassination planning all indicate a definite administration desire to overthrow Castro, and a readiness to rely on invasion to this end. Likewise, the warnings to the Soviets (actually, belated) not to send offensive weapons. That's especially true of the October 2 McNamara memo to the Chiefs.

Yet JFK—who definitely did not expect missiles to be emplaced, on the basis of the reassurances from Khrushchev—did appear to be resistant to the Republican and Congressional pressures to act and definitely did not seem to have made any

decision to invade, despite the fact that the Soviet deliveries not only would have provided an excuse but would have assured (at least—and probably at most—initially) popular support in the US (though not in Latin America or Europe).

It could be that the evident Soviet deliveries—the possibility that Soviet support for Cuba meant that the Soviets were more likely to respond by pressure on Berlin—really did slow JFK up in his earlier inclination for direct intervention in Cuba. Even so, he clearly was prepared to do so if a good occasion arose: or conceivably, if the Republican pressure threatened him with serious losses in November. (JFK undertook almost unprecedented presidential campaigning for a Congressional election year, to avert such losses and perhaps strengthen his majority).

The JCS themselves seem almost surely to have been convinced by October 1, if not earlier, that the Soviets were deploying ballistic missiles. The Il-28s, with an offensive nuclear capability against the US, were discovered on Sept. 28, and by October 1 very credible reports of MRBMs were coming in. It was these that led to the pressure that culminated in a presidential decision on October 9 to resume U-2 flights over Cuba, suspended for fear of a shootdown by a SAM like that which had occurred in September in China. If the photos of Oct. 14 were a surprise to JFK on Oct. 16, they were not to SAC or the JCS (or Nitze, who had been briefed days earlier by a Navy officer).

It was the October 1 JCS meeting with McNamara that was followed by his Oct. 2 directive for advanced contingency planning. (Thus, the possibility or probability of missiles may have been in his mind on October 2, even though the memo doesn't emphasize that, mentioning it only as one of a list of possible triggers for invasion or air attack or blockade.)

[3:36 PM As Prufrock would say: It is impossible to say just what I mean! Or LeRoi Jones' hipster: He was lost\in the forest of motives...only ideas\and their opposites\ like he was *really* nowhere]

What I mean:

JFK and RFK wanted to replace Castro: kill him, create an uprising and invade and occupy Cuba, whatever it took.

The Soviet supply of weapons and "technicians" provided both an excuse and political pressure from Republicans to carry this out, preferably before the November, 1962 elections. But at the same time, they may have been somewhat of a deterrent. (Despite the pressure and excuse, JFK seems to have been reluctant to invade in the summer and into the fall).

As the buildup and pressure increased, and McCone predicted the deployment of missiles (as did, it appears, SAC and DIA and the JCS) (though CIA analysts did not) JFK chose to issue a strong warning against such a deployment. I believe (probably,

not certainly: this will be implicit from now on; it reflects a choice among speculations in the controversy among scholars and former officials, based on evidence I won't present here) that JFK did not believe the deployment was likely, but the warning might reduce a low probability still lower, near zero. (Actually, the deployment was in progress and some missiles had already arrived. CHECK)

Anyway, I think the main purpose of the Sept. 3 statement was to contradict those who were saying in Congress that missiles had already been sent or were on the way, by saying that the administration had no evidence of these (untrue: but no evidence that JFK believed) and did not expect them. At the same time, he wanted to show toughness (for political purposes, in the campaign) by saying there was a line the Soviets must not cross, or "gravest issues would arise," i.e. he would consider military action.

In other words, I think the statement was mainly meant to explain why he was **not** taking the action that others, mainly Republican, were demanding; *and* that it was not because he was a pacifist (as his speechwriter, Sorensen, gave evidence of being, having been a CO) or lily-livered. Likewise for the second warning, on Sept. 15.

Still, he wanted to be *able* to attack, blockade or invade **before the election**, if he should want to do that. Another exercise was announced after Oct. 2 as a cover for the movement of supplies and troops preparatory to such actions, if he should decide to order them. Presumably (since I don't think he had made a decision yet) he envisioned the possibility of one or more of several real contingencies:

- a) hard evidence that missiles would be deployed, or had started to be installed;
- b) short of missiles, a significant increase in the buildup of Soviet support beyond what had been seen already (short of missiles), like the Il-28s spotted on Sept. 28 (or the FROGs, that weren't actually seen until Oct. 26);
- c) a Cuban "provocation," possibly stimulated by Mongoose; or (
- d) political prospects in October that seemed alarming, providing incentive for an "October surprise" (as some Republicans were predicting, with more than a few suspecting that the eventual crisis confirmed). The first three of these—not the fourth—were included in McNamara's list of October 2.

So—he wanted to keep a **quick** invasion, or air attack, "on the table" in October, even if missiles (the least likely, in his mind) did not show up. Preparations for blockade were also directed and prepared, before October 14.

My strong hypothesis: The actual appearance of the missiles on October 14 took both air attack and invasion **off** the table in JFK's mind, after the first few hours of his initial reaction on the morning of the 16th. The CIA could not guarantee that none were operational even then, on Tuesday, (though they thought not) or would

not be by the next day or two, when an attack could first be launched. (By Friday, they regarded some of them operational; but it could have been earlier). Nor could they or the JCS be sure, at any point in the crisis, that they had spotted all the missiles, or more than 60% of them (where did that estimate come from?). Any they had not seen would not be destroyed in the attack and might fire subsequently. They didn't know whether warheads had arrived (they had), but "had to assume" they were available. So any attack involved some risk that one or more warheads would destroy an American city, or several. Despite what he indicated internally and what he said to the world on October 22—that he did not want nuclear war but that he was prepared to risk it if necessary—I believe he was **not** prepared to risk nuclear war—however small the risk might appear—by attacking missiles that might be operational with nuclear warheads.

That is to say that I think he was sane, sensible (unlike, say, the JCS). **He was not crazy. He only chose to appear to be.** But to make that appearance credible enough to be effective in bargaining (and in domestic politics, before the elections of 1962 and especially 1964), he had to take actions preparatory to invasion and to nuclear war, and actual acts of war (the blockade) which *did* risk a two- or three-sided war and even nuclear war, limited or all-out: though he believed the risks were less than those of an attack. (The JCS and some civilians argued the contrary).

He believed he could control those risks (unless Khrushchev reacted violently and precipitously to the blockade, which Llewellyn Thompson and the CIA thought unlikely, and which proved not to be the case, in the short run, on Wednesday morning, Oct. 24).

He did have an exaggerated sense of his own ability (and Khrushchev's) to control these risks once he had initiated the blockade and other steps. But I think he thought of them as fairly small, **given** (I believe) his very secret knowledge that he was privately prepared to make what others would regard as great concessions to get the missiles out without war.

He signaled this to the ExComm as early as October 20, in the Saturday meeting. (M&Z, 199, 201), though only as a possible option after the blockade was in place. Actually, I believe that he and McNamara believed, as much as Stevenson, that the only alternative to an attack was a "trade" of the Cuban missiles for US (NATO) missiles in Turkey and Italy (and Greece, he kept mentioning, although we had no missiles in Greece: they had been offered, but refused by the Greeks).

And although he always in the ExComm described attack and trade as alternatives (the "only two"), I believe that he secretly ruled out attack, so that a trade was what he expected. He could still hope to keep the terms down: perhaps to Turkey alone, without Italy, let alone even broader demands that Khrushchev might conceivably make. For that he needed both the demonstration of his risk-taking in the blockade—"He's got to see you move"—and continued preparations for attack.